

12-13-1986

## UA3/7/5 The Inauguration Address

Samuel Kern Alexander  
*Western Kentucky University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc\\_ua\\_records](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records)



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Organizational Communication Commons](#), [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Alexander, Samuel Kern, "UA3/7/5 The Inauguration Address" (1986). *WKU Archives Records*. Paper 6165.  
[https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc\\_ua\\_records/6165](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/6165)

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact [topscholar@wku.edu](mailto:topscholar@wku.edu).





## *The Inauguration Address*

*Samuel Kern Alexander Jr., Ed.D.*

*Seventh President of*

*Western Kentucky University*

*December 13, 1986*



## *The Inauguration Address*

Chairman Iracane, thank you.

Governor Collins, Governor Chandler, Governor Combs, Governor Nunn, Superintendent McDonald, Chancellor Reed, and Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Regents, faculty, and students, I thank you for coming today to celebrate this important occasion in the life of Western Kentucky University. We are delighted to have our guests, both national and international, here with us. Among our honored guests are official representatives of universities, academies, and learned societies, extending their respect to Western by their attendance. I am particularly pleased that institutions from which I graduated—Centre College, Indiana University, and Oxford University, in addition to Western—are represented here today.

Of special pride for me is the presence of my tutor from Oxford University, Dr. Vivian Williams, who traveled all the way from England to be with us. Also here is a member of my doctoral committee at Indiana University, Dr. Forbis Jordan. Dr. Jordan, himself a graduate of Western and a manager for Uncle Ed Diddle, has been a close personal friend and colleague of mine for many years. Present, too, are some of my former graduate students, who are now nationally known professors in their own right, representing their respective institutions: Dr. Martha McCarthy, Indiana University; Dr. Nelda McCabe, Miami University, Ohio; Dr. William Sparkman,

Texas Tech University; Dr. Deborah Inman, New York University; Dr. Patricia Anthony, University of Massachusetts; Dr. Richard Salmon, Virginia Tech University; and Dr. Julie Underwood, University of Wisconsin.

I accept the presidency of Western Kentucky University with a deep sense of humility. There is no honor that the people of my native state could have bestowed on me which I could cherish more than the opportunity to serve them as president of Western. Western is the alma mater of my mother, father, sisters, and brother. Members of my family have received no fewer than thirteen degrees from Western, and the institution has been a source of intellectual nourishment and inspiration to us for sixty years. In accepting this office today, I wish also to acknowledge my great debt to the people of Kentucky who, through their public common schools, provided me with educational opportunity which has enabled me to be here today.

I must also express my gratitude to you, Chairman Joe Iracane, and to the other members of the Board of Regents, the faculty, and students who have shown their confidence in me by calling me to the service of this great university. Too, I cannot refrain from taking this occasion to thank all of you for the genuine warmth which you have extended to me and my family since we returned to Kentucky. It's good to be home.

The presence of our governors, state leaders, scholars, and distinguished guests today bears testimony to Western's emergence as a university of excellence and witnesses the progress made over these eighty years, from a small normal school to an important status in the system of higher education of this state and region of the country. From the General Assembly's act of creation in 1906, Western has steadily progressed through economic depression, inflation, wars, and periods of fiscal stress, seemingly gaining strength through adversity. The support of the institution from state leaders has been remarkably constant, and the governors on the stage with us today represent a major force in the advancement of this institution.

Western, too, has been fortunate to have had strong internal leadership, beginning with President Henry Hardin Cherry through Dr. Paul L. Garrett, Dr. Kelly Thompson, Dr. Dero Downing, Dr. John Minton, and Dr. Donald Zacharias. Also, Western has had the good fortune in having other truly outstanding leaders and teachers, such as Dean Finley C. Grise, Dean Tate C. Page, Dr. Gordon Wilson, Dr. J. R. Alexander, Dr. H. M. Yarbrough, Dr. L. Y. Lancaster, Dr. H. L. Stephens, Mr. Ivan Wilson, Dr. Willson Wood, Mr. George Page, Miss Frances Richards, and many others. It was around these



persons that Western has grown and prospered. Whatever we are able to do in the future and whatever this institution becomes will be to the greatest measure attributable to those who have gone before us. Our accomplishments will be their accomplishments, for we all stand on the shoulders of those who have preceded us.

The past is secure, but what of the future? Will we be able to regard that, too, with satisfaction? I believe so. Despite the many uncertainties which face us today, I think we can look confidently to an expanded horizon for the advancement of education in Kentucky, and we can be assured that Western will have an indispensable role in Kentucky's future.

To look to the years ahead, though, we must know and understand ourselves today. We must have a firm philosophical foundation on which to build this institution. A major aspect of our philosophy, I believe, may be found in the words of President John F. Kennedy when he said:

*"I look forward to an America... which will not be afraid of grace and beauty ... an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business and statecraft. I look forward to an America which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all our citizens. And I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world not only for its strength, but for its civilization as well."*

This university is an instrument of the people to be used to advance our civilization and to enrich our culture by cultivation of the poet, the artist, the scholar, and the person versed in the affairs of state as well as in business enterprise.

The university must be a place of liberal learning where men and women are uplifted by enhancement of their intellectual and moral powers. In order for our democratic state to survive and progress, there must be a fountain from which intellectual, aesthetic, and moral values readily flow and permeate the total being of our society—this fountain is the university.

In its broadest sense, the university must strive to enhance the collective wisdom of the people. A democratic community presupposes a people who are knowledgeable and wise. Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, once wrote:

*"When the few rule the state, it may be sufficient if they (only) are wise. When the whole people are the ultimate rulers (as in our democracy), nothing less than a wise people will do." (The University of Utopia). Knowledge is a prerequisite to wisdom.*

The great university should be a marketplace of ideas where scholars research, analyze, and debate the range of human endeavors and experiences—the ideas that have discovered the elements of human life, the nature of the atom, the structure of the universe, and the theories that have formed the foundations of man's social and legal systems.

The university is the special sanctuary designated by our society as a place for study and pursuit of knowledge for its own end. In the words of John Henry Newman, "Knowledge is capable of being its own end.... It is its own reward." Or as Dean J. Douglas Brown of Princeton University puts it, "The university must convey those civilizing precepts which salvage man from ignorance, prejudice, greed, and superstition and which enhance man's respect for the dignity of his fellowman."

Thus the university is a place which advances the love of learning and the importance of knowledge. The university will always be found as a fortress against "contracting man's spectrum of knowledge." At its core, the university must enhance and endorse liberal arts and through its curriculum assure that every student has the essential information which our society wishes to pass on from generation to generation—those aspects of history, language, and mathematics which create a more productive citizenry.

The obligation of the state university to society goes beyond the monastic pursuit of narrowly defined learning or by the hermetic introspection. A privately endowed college may so limit itself and confine its curriculum to pure liberal studies, or even to the more ancient classical studies, but the state university must not be so restricted. Eminence as a state university cannot be achieved by imitating privately endowed universities, which have an entirely different societal role and no particular or direct responsibility to the taxpayers of the state. The state university must be more and do more. A university such as Western should encompass all the areas of classical and liberal education and reach far beyond. This expanded view of the university was clearly enunciated by President Van Hise of the University of Wisconsin when he said:

*"A university supported by the state for all its people, for all its sons and daughters, with their tastes and aptitudes as varied as mankind, can place no bounds upon the lines of its endeavor, or the state is the irreparable loser."*

Whether the choice is language, mathematics, history, literature, folklore, journalism, communications, political economy, education, pure science, agriculture, engi-



neering, architecture, sculpture, painting, or music, the sons and daughters of the state should find the opportunity to advance their intellectual life according to their needs. A narrower view does not extend social justice and frustrates the will of the people of the state.

The broad and comprehensive curriculum we desire must be taught by scholars who are willing to extend their knowledge for the service of the state. The philosophy that we should strive to follow as an institution should be to make "the beneficent influences of the University available in every home of the state," providing "a community of scholars making itself as useful as possible." (Van Hise). The Western philosophy that I envision is encapsulated in this quotation from Dr. Frank Graham, Chancellor of the University of North Carolina:

*"The university of the people has the responsibility of taking the university—the professors, the books, the skills, the findings of research, the interpretations, the insights, the forums, and the publications to the people, ... so as to make all the resources of the university available to the people beyond the college walls."*

6

This, I believe, enunciates Western's traditional philosophy, so aptly espoused by Dr. Henry Hardin Cherry and reinforced through the years—the philosophy that the "boundaries of the campus extend to the borders of the state."

To achieve this "service" function for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Western's scholars must aggressively seek to identify and help resolve problems of public concern, to stimulate critical thinking of the public, to identify public educational needs, to create and stimulate demand for higher levels of education, and to utilize the resources of the university in provision of broad-based formal and informal educational services throughout this region of Kentucky.

The university must marry the theoretical with the practical. The scholar must stand beside the men and women of practical affairs. Professors in the arts and sciences and the professional schools must pool their talents with farmers, businessmen, public educators, and politicians to resolve the practical problems and dilemmas of everyday life.

We should always keep in mind that the primary reason for existence of the state university is to educate the youth of the state. In order to accomplish this, we must first instill in our citizenry a desire and an aspiration for higher education. In this regard, the university is the state's primary mechanism for conveying the value of education to the people.

The university must recognize the people's needs and stimulate a demand for educational responses to these needs. In order to do this, the university must draw nearer to the elementary and secondary schools in identifying and shaping the educational programs necessary to address those student needs.

The final and supreme test of the university is whether we have expanded educational opportunity and have touched and positively influenced greater numbers of each succeeding generation of the youth of Kentucky; whether we have efficiently applied the resources of the state in providing our society with learned and creative young men and women in every area of human endeavor.

In summary, the philosophy and goals of Western Kentucky University must be:

(1) To instill a desire and appreciation for knowledge, both for its own sake and as a means for betterment of our society;

(2) To conduct research and bring the intellectual power of the university to bear on the problems of our society;

(3) To join liberal and practical studies into a close union in order to directly influence the advancement of our social and economic conditions;

(4) To provide an opportunity for all the youth of the Commonwealth to develop their innate capacities to the maximum extent possible;

(5) To expand the borders of the campus to bestow the "beneficence of the university" on every family of the state;

(6) To keep in the forefront of the university's ideals the broad humanitarian purpose of service to the community; and, finally,

(7) To remain adaptable and flexible in interpreting the needs of the people of Kentucky.

In summary, I would say that an overarching objective must be for us to utilize the university to mitigate inequality in our society. Western was founded as a normal school on the premise that basic education must be extended to the boys and girls of Kentucky through a well-educated teaching force. Generally, the teachers who came to Western were of poor to moderate means, and the children they taught were of similar economic condition. Western has always been an institution concerned with the need of the common man and woman, an institution founded on the principle of equality and the desirability of social mobility. A belief that was asserted eighty years ago and continues today is that all the children of the state should have the education that would enable them, with honest effort and earnest labor, to be successful, contributing members of society.

7



In this regard, Western as an institution, and we, as individuals, should at all times inveigh and stand as a bulwark against artificial restraints on the expansion of education. We must examine and reexamine our conduct to avert our natural and human complacency toward injustice. It is within the province of the university to influence the social and economic realities which permeate society. The theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, has observed that:

*"It has always been the habit of privileged groups to deny the oppressed classes every opportunity for the cultivation of innate capacities and then to accuse them of lacking what they have been denied the right to acquire."*

8 The public schools and universities stand as monumental efforts to facilitate the "cultivation" of each person's "innate capacities." Let us be very sure that we do not impose tests and hurdles which "blame the victim" for educational deficiencies for which he or she is faultless. We should be wary of our human frailties which might lead us to exclusiveness and limit the public good and common welfare by restricting educational opportunity. Western should stand forthright and assert a will to erase economic, social, and hereditary privilege and seek to foster a society where those who are industrious, knowledgeable, ethical, and moral will be held in highest esteem.

These are the principles and philosophy for which Western has stood for eighty years, and herein lies our formula for the future. To fashion our future and to shape our destiny here at Western, we must see ourselves greatly. And though we revere and hold in high regard those who have preceded us, we cannot be merely tenants in this house. We must work assertively to mold this institution and raise it to new heights for the betterment of succeeding generations. Our task is far from done. Western is still a young institution. We should approach our presence here at Western, all of us, as a potential watershed in the history of this institution. We must struggle against the status quo and think expansively and creatively.

It should be our desire that eighty years hence, as our children look back on our achievements, they will acknowledge our time as a golden period in Western's history—not only a time of responsible stewardship, but as an era of expansion of knowledge, equality of educational opportunity, and enhancement of our culture and the civility of our society.

Thank you, and again we appreciate your coming to be with us here today.